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ABSTRACT

Influencing campus activities through formal participation can be an important aspect of a student's college experience. In this paper, the author briefly surveys the recent demand for this participation and views student influence in terms of the specific nature of participation, reasons for student involvement, and special problems peculiar to the junior college. Steps leading to more meaningful involvement conclude the paper. (J0)

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THE STUDENT AND CAMPUS GOVERNANCE

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The May 8, 1969, issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education reflected the following headlines:

"Backlash Grows in Congress as Campus Protests Intensify"
"Response to Armed Negroes Divides Cornell Community"
"Student Protests Hit 35 Colleges in One Month"

More than 70 college presidents resigned this year, and some colleges went through the year without presidents because they couldn't find competent men. A New York Times editorial on April 22, 1969, stated:

The academic world was aghast in the 1930's when pictures of academic convocations in German universities featured jackbooted students with daggers and sidearms...Most educators...needed no further confirmation that the bell had tolled for German universities and for freedom.

Now arms have been introduced into the campus controversy at Cornell, and only blindness to the lessons of history can shut out the fundamental nature of the threat that development poses.

A recent Higher Education Reports bulletin from the U.S. Office of Education had the following to say:

The entire syndrome we now face...violence, disruption, confrontations ...is a tragic development in the history of American higher education. All of us are agreed, I believe, that it is essential to maintain the integrity and autonomy of our educational community. Thus, we must guard against those few who employ the rhetoric and tactics of violence in order to destroy institutions for which they have no real understanding, institutions dedicated to the life of the mind.

The report went on to discuss ways that colleges should implement recent Federal legislation that permits institutions to lift aid being given to students who create disruptions on campus.

Where is the student in the midst of all the turmoil in higher education? Who is the student in higher education? A general description of the college student today might run like this:

He is more likely to be a man, white, native born, from a city of over 100,000, middle class, mom and dad had at least graduated from high school, father is a manager or a professional, student likely to hold at least a part-time job; he has warm feelings toward his school and his professors, plans to continue his studies, and plans to become a professional. He is a "B" average student, thinks of

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himself as being in the upper 1/4 of his class, has lived in a dorm or off-campus housing. He sees himself as conventional, politically liberal, cooperative, ambitious, fun-loving, athletic, and cautious.

Wait! How can colleges be in such a state of disruption and the student be as that described above? The reason is that the hard core activists make up less than one percent of the students on any particular campus, with maybe another one percent who become supportive of the hard core during a crisis.

The danger of listing the computerized characteristics of the average student is that the description may not fit exactly any one student on a particular campus. People can't be averaged; they are unique individuals with their own peculiar personality and behavior characteristics. Even to say that students today are more intelligent, more widely traveled, more mature, and more sophisticated than their predecessors is not fair. Some of those who are most vociferous in their demands do not fit into this category.

Having come to the conclusion that the student body is a collection of individuals with varied interests and having found no way to generalize those students or interests into a common force or body, it might be best to look at college governance at this point.

The Study Commission on University Governance, a special committee of the Academic Senate of the University of California at Berkeley, did an extensive study on governance at that University. The Commission found that the University had failed crucially in two ways:

1. "...the failure to develop a student body which respects the value of the intellect itself..."
2. "...failure to order its activities according to a conscious conception of its unique purpose of nurturing the intellect."

The Commission recognized the fact that the tremendous growth of the University had brought several complications into governance. Some of the problems created by largeness alone are departmental power struggles, loss of identity by members of the academic community, and loss of freedom. The Commission went on record as favoring decentralization of the powers of the University.

Other recommendations of the Commission were increased student participation, reorganization of student government, establishment of a community model consisting of the various constituencies of the academic community (administrators, faculty, students), and a more equitable judicial system.

A minority report of the Commission was also written. The writers of the minority report disagreed with the majority on the following points:

1. Criteria such as competence, interest, or responsibility were not taken into account in the discussion of representation of the three major groups of the academic community.

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2. Enforcing rules and defying them are equally disruptive.
3. Many of the causes for campus disorders lie outside the universities' control.
4. Education "...tailored to the demands of a society devoted to economic growth, technological advance, and increased international influence and dominion has ceased to nourish the best aspirations of the contemporary student and faculty member."
5. "Participation in administration is a good education for being an administrator. The main point of a university administration is not to educate; it is to provide the conditions under which members of the university can educate themselves. By failing to keep track of such distinctions, the majority runs a real risk of doing for the university what the misinterpreters of Dewey did for the high school."

The minority report made the following statement with respect to what should be done in college governance:

What is needed, in essence, are settings for productive argument and processes of reaching decisions which command the confidence and respect of the community. Through student participation in governance, the campus is urged to transcend the interest group model and reach a state of community, where the major decisions grow out of "open discussions in a spirit of mutual trust."

Both the majority and minority report stressed decentralization and student participation. The difference was that the minority group developed guidelines for the type of student participation.

I feel very much like Dean E. G. Williamson when he remarked that he had been developing his talk on the college student all his life and hadn't completed it. I think this is common among professionals who work in student personnel services in higher education, and I think it is especially true of staff who work directly with students in the extra-curriculum. The extra-curriculum is highly experience oriented, and the staff become caught up in a continually evolving experience with students that never really becomes an orderly structure.

In attempting an analysis of the topic of this paper, I started with several dichotomies (centralization vs. decentralization, competition vs. cooperation, freedom vs. license, psychology vs. logic, etc.). The problem with dichotomies is that they are seldom exclusionary in real life, but what may in fact be reality is a mixture of opposing forces that exist in varying degrees at one moment and at differing degrees in another moment. This could be a definition of life itself, a fluid, ever changing process. DeCarte once said that to understand anything, man must order his thinking. It seems that this ordered thinking or, as it is called these days, the scientific method, has had a profound influence upon all of education. It is a much simpler task to analyze problems in terms of dichotomies, but the difficulty is that man isn't simple; he is extremely complex.

There are so many vantage points from which to view college governance and so many variables that affect its effectiveness that it often appears futile to attempt any understanding. The variable of size alone may drastically influence the effectiveness of government. As a school grows larger, it becomes increasingly difficult for the various constituencies to identify with their government.

The legal aspects of governance in a college setting have changed considerably within the last ten years, especially with respect to extending the basic rights guaranteed under the constitution to college students in the college setting. Generally, public institutions are controlled by the state legislature and, in most cases, through a board responsible to the legislature. Powers are further delegated to key administrators. Faculties have a great deal of influence in affecting policy within a given institution. Students have negligible influence because very little unifies the students as a group; they lack experience, and they generally are given little respect for competence in the area of decision making by either faculty or administration. Only one state, California, spells out legally provisions for a student government at its state colleges.

Even though provision is made, little has been done in California or any other state, legally or professionally, to spell out the nature of student participation in campus governance; "...the university fails or succeeds at the point where the professor and the student meet. Unless this basic aim is kept in mind, whole departments may indulge themselves in the irrelevant, immaterial, and the futile. They need to recall: 'A little child must lead them,' 'What does it profit one who gains a world (i.e. of fact) and loses his soul.'" (p. 230, Ackerman) Where faculty members have no more concern than to dispense facts in a classroom, all of the student service staff proficiency possible will not save the college. The primary purpose of an institution of higher education is the interaction between students and faculty. The service elements exist to create a supportive atmosphere around this basic purpose.

If the basic purpose of an institution of higher education is learning, then it would seem that this must also be one of the purposes for involving students in governance, i.e. for the educational value. Another reason for student involvement might be to draw upon student opinion in areas of legitimate student concern (housing, food service, college store, student programs and organizations, code of conduct, course and teacher evaluation, student welfare, etc.). Another reason might be to give competent students a role in helping to develop educational programs.

Much of the above discussion could apply equally well to two and four-year colleges. Are there special problems in a junior college? This is a difficult question to address because of the extreme heterogeneity of junior college institutions. Because of this problem, I chose to discuss student involvement in college governance in a more narrow setting, out of my experience. Much of what I have to say could apply, I think, to a wide range of junior colleges, but the information was gained from experiences in a large, urban, multi-campus community college with an open-door policy.

Junior college students in the community college represent the widest cross section of student interest, intelligence, ethnic and racial background, economic and social position, and almost any other characteristic existing in society,

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found in institutions of higher education. Those students who become involved in student government lack leadership and organizational experience, are generally younger than their counterparts in four-year institutions, and in the main are continually struggling to stay in school.

Student leaders seldom seek help from various college resources in solving their problems, even though they have been told the resources exist. High striving and a strong sense of responsibility further characterize student leaders. This, coupled with their inability to cope with many of their problems, sets up a whole failure syndrome. It is as if the student leaders were bound for failure before they started. Alvin Zander explored this phenomena and found,

...the desire to avoid failure invokes a tendency to choose difficult tasks after the group has failed...members who are concerned about failure select conditions conducive to another failure immediately after they have failed. What they wish to avoid, it seems, is not the failure itself as much as embarrassment after failure. Such humiliation is more likely to be avoided if the failure is on a difficult task than on an easy one. (p. 424)

He further stated that it is apparently easier "...to induce unsuccessful groups to set unreasonable goals than to get successful groups to do so." (p. 425) The junior college students have a strong tendency to copy the four-year student program.

If student involvement in campus governance as well as their own governance is to be meaningful for junior college students, several steps should be taken to aid student leaders:

1. Establishment of a leadership training program to enable students to acquire basic understandings and skills in organizational development and management, accounting, and human relations.
2. Involve student leaders in stable, working college committees so that they gain both a better understanding of a college in the process and a model from which to compare their own organization and subcommittees.
3. Encourage interaction between key administrators and student leaders on issues of mutual concern.
4. Work to develop a philosophy, set purposes and objectives and procedures for total campus governance as well as student government and its place within campus governance.

The Director of Student Activities cannot, along, help students establish a meaningful student government; nor can he help students take a role in campus governance. There must exist an atmosphere of acceptance and support from the board on down if an effective program of student involvement is to occur. It can't happen in a vacuum.

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